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Minister

Parks Branch

Crooked Lake Provincial Park

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CROOKED LAKE PROVINCIAL

RECREATION PARK

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Background

In 1958 the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) engaged a consultant to investigate and evaluate the existing and potential outdoor recreation areas in southern Saskatchewan. This report recommended the acquisition of a number of areas with natural outdoor recreation potential. Many were purchased by DNR in the early 1960's and plans were made for their development. The property at Crooked Lake was acquired at that time and subsequently designated as a Provincial Recreation Site.

The Crooked Lake Recreation Site shoreline was originally used for private summer cottages; however the cottages were relocated to the Greenspot Cottage Subdivision, to the southeast, and the area developed for public use and access to the lake. A preliminary plan of development was prepared and internal roads, boat launch area and parking lots were constructed.

It was during this period that the four Indian Bands with land on the south side of the Qu'Appelle Valley between Round and Crooked Lakes began to seriously consider development of recreation potential on their lands. The "Last Oak Park" proposal was developed, consisting of a series of individual sites on the four reserves. Day use areas, campgrounds, cottage subdivisions, a golf course, ski resort, accommodation and other commercial ventures were planned. Considerable federal and provincial government capital investment was made in support of the Indian recreational venture.

In the latter 1960's and 1970's all further major development at the Recreation Site was held in abeyance pending the development of the Indian lands on the south side of Round and Crooked Lakes. By 1980 the Last Oak Park had not been fully developed as originally anticipated. The Bands agreed to dispense with the Last Oak Park Corporation in favour of more local reserve autonomy and independent band management of developed facilities such as the ski resort (Ochapowace), the golf course (Cowessess), and the Grenfell Beach cottage subdivision (Sakimay). None of the Bands have developed public outdoor recreation facilities on their reserves and future plans remain uncertain.

By the mid 1980's it was apparent that a public recreation need existed which could best be served, as originally intended, at the Crooked Lake Provincial Park. The Recreation Site, reclassified in 1986 as a Provincial Recreation Park, will provide much needed improvement to the public outdoor recreational opportunities in the area. It is expected to complement opportunities on Indian lands, by attracting additional users to the area, rather than detracting from them.

Park Classification and Purpose

One of the major provisions of the Parks Act is to identify a classification of Provincial Parks for the purpose of creating a greater public awareness of the primary purpose of individual parks and therefore a more appropriate understanding and use of the area. Four classes of Provincial Parks are now

identified: Wilderness Parks; Natural Environment Parks; Recreation Parks and Historic Parks. As a Recreation Park, Crooked Lake will be developed and used in a manner distinctly different from the other three classes of Provincial Parks.

The primary purpose of Crooked Lake Provincial Park will be to provide high quality recreational opportunities in the region. The focus will be on development of facilities to support a wide range of recreational activities in an attractive natural setting. Crooked Lake Provincial Recreation Park will utilize most of its area and variety of resources to encourage the widest possible segment of the public to come to the Park and to experience and enjoy the out-of-doors.

The Park will serve the local residents primarily as a day-use area as well as complement the system of recreational facilities established along the Qu'Appelle Valley Recreation Corridor. The Park provides the only major area of public parkland in the lower Qu'Appelle region and on Crooked Lake itself. It offers a variety of quality outdoor recreational opportunities for activities such as walking/hiking, nature study, camping, boating, fishing, canoeing, swimming/sun bathing, scenic appreciation and picnicking.

Location

Crooked Lake is located in the eastern reaches of the Qu'Appelle Valley about 45 km south of Melville and 40 km north-east of Grenfell. The Provincial Park can be reached by following Highway #47 south from Melville or north from Grenfell and turning east onto Highway #247 in the Qu'Appelle Valley. Alternative routes from further east are via Highway #9 south from Stockholm or north from Whitewood to #247 or north from Broadview on route #201. Tourists may be attracted from the Trans-Canada Highway, about 20 km south, to enjoy the sight-seeing and park facilities along this short alternate loop.

Natural Features

The Qu'Appelle Valley landscape is always changing, although it might not be obvious during the course of one's lifetime. Looking at the broad, deep valley one might conclude that this feature was so grand that it always has been there, and always will be.

The surface character of the Qu'Appelle Valley is mainly the result of the Wisconsinan deglaciation, the last of four Pleistocene glacial events. This last glacial retreat occurred approximately 10,000 years ago in this area. The Qu'Appelle Valley was carved by meltwater from this last retreating ice sheet. The flow of water was so great that the valley channel was cut nearly 183 metres (600 feet) deep, completed through the accumulated hills of all previous glaciers and, in places, into the buried bedrock.

Since the retreat of the last glacier, erosion by wind and water has worked to level and modify the landscape around this 'glacial spillway'. The valley has been partially filled, hills have been worn down and the flow of water in the valley, the Qu'Appelle River, is now a mere trickle by comparison to the original volumes.

The Qu'Appelle Valley is approximately 107 metres (350 feet) deep and a mile wide in the vicinity of Crooked Lake. The lake lies at an altitude of 451.7 metres (1,482 feet) above sea level while the gently rolling upland immediately north and east is at an elevation of approximately 556.3 metres (1,825 feet). The dominant physical feature is Crooked Lake. With a surface area of approximately 1,500 ha (3,700 acres) and a mean depth of 7.9 metres (26 feet), it is one of the smaller lakes in the Qu'Appelle Basin.

The park area itself is a combination of typical valley bottom, steep valley slopes and upland plains. The valley bottom, sloping gently southward from the toe of the steeper valley sides to the lake, is approximately one-eighth of a mile wide and a mile long. Highway 247 parallels the north-east shore of Crooked Lake at the toe of the steep valley sides. Nearly one mile of shoreline is within the Park, however there are no well developed natural sand beaches such as can be found elsewhere on the lake.

The configuration of the upland and the erosional features of the valley walls combine to produce some excellent scenic viewpoints overlooking the Qu'Appelle Valley and Crooked Lake.

The vegetation in this portion of the Qu'Appelle Valley closely resembles that of the Aspen Grove Parkland Region. A marked contrast exists in the type and extent of vegetation cover between south-facing and north-facing slopes. Grasslands and shrubs dominate the south-facing valley walls. Trees and heavy shrub growth are largely confined to coulees and depressions. Shrubs include snowberry, saskatoon and chokecherry with clumps of aspen poplar and rose in the more sheltered coulees. Bur oak, which are rare in Saskatchewan, can be found within the Park area, however they are more common in the Qu'Appelle Valley further east.

On the north shoreline of Crooked Lake native communities of manitoba maple, elm and ash are common, as well as aspen poplar, balsam poplar and, occasionally white birch. Willows, elderberry, high bush cranberry and red osier dogwood can also be found adjacent to the water.

The upland portion of the Park is typical parkland with scattered aspen groves and occasional remnants of native grasses such as spear grass, june grass, western wheat grass and blue grama grass.

There are 34 species of fish reported in the Qu'Appelle River system. Of the larger species of fish, the sport fish most sought by anglers are the northern pike, walleye and yellow perch. Rock bass and whitefish are also found but perch is the most abundant species. The three major sport fish species spawn within the shallow areas of the lake. Pike and perch utilize the shallow marshy areas and weeded shorelines while the walleye spawn upon the shallow gravelly areas of the shoreline.

The Crooked Lake reach of the Qu'Appelle Valley contains a variety of wildlife populations associated with the vegetation communities found in the Valley. Species of special note in the upland areas include white-tailed deer and sharp-tailed grouse. Some of the largest numbers of white-tailed deer can be found to be wintering in the Qu'Appelle Valley east of Crooked and Round Lakes, especially at the mouths of major tributaries. Mule deer are also present in the region.

Other animals common to both the upland and valley areas include coyotes, red foxes, porcupines, rabbits, badgers, striped skunks, grey squirrels and many species of rodents. Beaver, mink and muskrat are found along the river and, more commonly, on tributary streams.

The diversity of habitats in the eastern portion of the Qu'Appelle makes it excellent for birds. The most common upland bird species include hawks, crows, magpies, kingbirds, shrikes, meadowlarks, owls and sparrows.

Several hundred species of birds occupy, use or regularly pass through the valley in the vicinity of the Park. These include a variety of ducks, geese, white pelicans, great blue herons, the double-crested cormotant and the turkey vulture. A number of shoreland species can be seen along the shores of Crooked Lake and the Qu'Appelle River.

The Moose Bay Burial Mound is most noteworthy as an archaeological site in the Crooked Lake area. It is one of ten known sites in the area and consists of eight bundle burials, several of which were under a roof-like structure of poles within the mound. This site has been dated as 910 (+/-70 years) before Present. A marker along Highway 247 acknowledges the general location of the Burial Mound on the upland west of the Park boundary.

Units of the Park

The Park is comprised of portions of five adjacent quarter sections on the northeast shore of Crooked Lake, all in Township 19, Range 5, West of the Second Meridian. The total area of the Provincial Park is 190.4 ha (470.46 acres).

Most public use of the former Recreation Site was limited to the gently sloping lake frontage south of Highway 247. This major valley highway separates the lower lakefront lands from the steep valley walls, coulees and upland further north and east.

The lower lakefront area will provide increased opportunities for land based recreational activities such as picnicking and camping and serve the primary function for public recreation access to Crooked Lake and associated backshore lands. Boat launching, sport fishing and limited sun bathing/beach facilities are located within this area. Access roads, parking and other basic services will continue to be concentrated in this area to provide a higher level of recreational services to the regional population.

The Valley walls are steep, sloping south and west towards Crooked Lake. They are grass covered except in sheltered gullies, ravines and depressions where parkland bush and tree species predominate. Where more gentle slopes and vegetative cover permits, campsites and trails are possible. The more exposed steep slopes are too sensitive to permit any intensive recreation uses, but provide an excellent natural backdrop for the Park.

The larger coulees are most attractive in terms of their natural habitat for wildlife. Natural springs found in these coulees are used by wildlife year-round. These sheltered coulees offer the most attractive hiking, cross-country trails or walking access to scenic viewpoints along the rim of the upland.

The Park includes portions of two quarter sections which are primarily upland, currently leased and under agricultural cultivation. Portions of the upland are suited to extensive recreation uses such as hiking, camping, trail riding, scenic viewing or cross-country skiing since they directly overlook the rim of the scenic Qu'Appelle Valley, the park centre and Crooked Lake.

Available Facilities

Development has been limited since the initial improvements in the mid 1960's when internal roads, boat launch and parking lots were constructed. Extensive tree planting was undertaken at the time as well. Fifty campsites have been developed, complete with tables, fireplaces, waste receptacles and parking. An overflow campground of 20 sites is also available. Some improvements have been made to the beach and a bath change house with showers has been located nearby. Toilet facilities, drinking water, and limited picnicking facilities are available between the shoreline and the internal access roads. The valley sides, coulees and upland areas are in their natural state and remain underutilized.

Recreation Use and Trends

Use of the Crooked Lake Recreation Site has increased slowly but steadily in the past decade. 13,821 vehicles entered the are in 1985 and 6,778 camper-days were recorded (more than double the 3,353 camper-days of 1980).

For many years the most common outdoor leisure pursuit in Canada has been driving for pleasure. Associated with driving have been traditional activities such as walking, picnicking, fishing, and sight seeing. Changing public attitudes towards the importance of health and physical fitness have resulted in a shift from the traditional rest and relaxation forms of leisure to more active forms of recreation and sports.

Changes in lifestyle, aging of the population, the economy and other factors will tend to influence current trends in the Qu'Appelle Basin. The past rapid growth in family camping is expected to level off, however the number of camp-days is expected to increase steadily. Day use of Provincial Recreation Parks is expected to increase at a steady rate. Land oriented recreational activities are also expected to increase, expecially the extensive forms such as cross-country skiing, hiking, and nature viewing. Water oriented activities are not expected to increase as rapidly in the Qu'Appelle Basin due to the poor water quality of the lakes in late summer.

Increases in visitation and use of Crooked Lake Provincial Park can be expected to reflect improvements to existing facilities and services, particularly in those activities already enjoyed by the local and regional market population.

Benefits of Crooked Lake Provincial Park

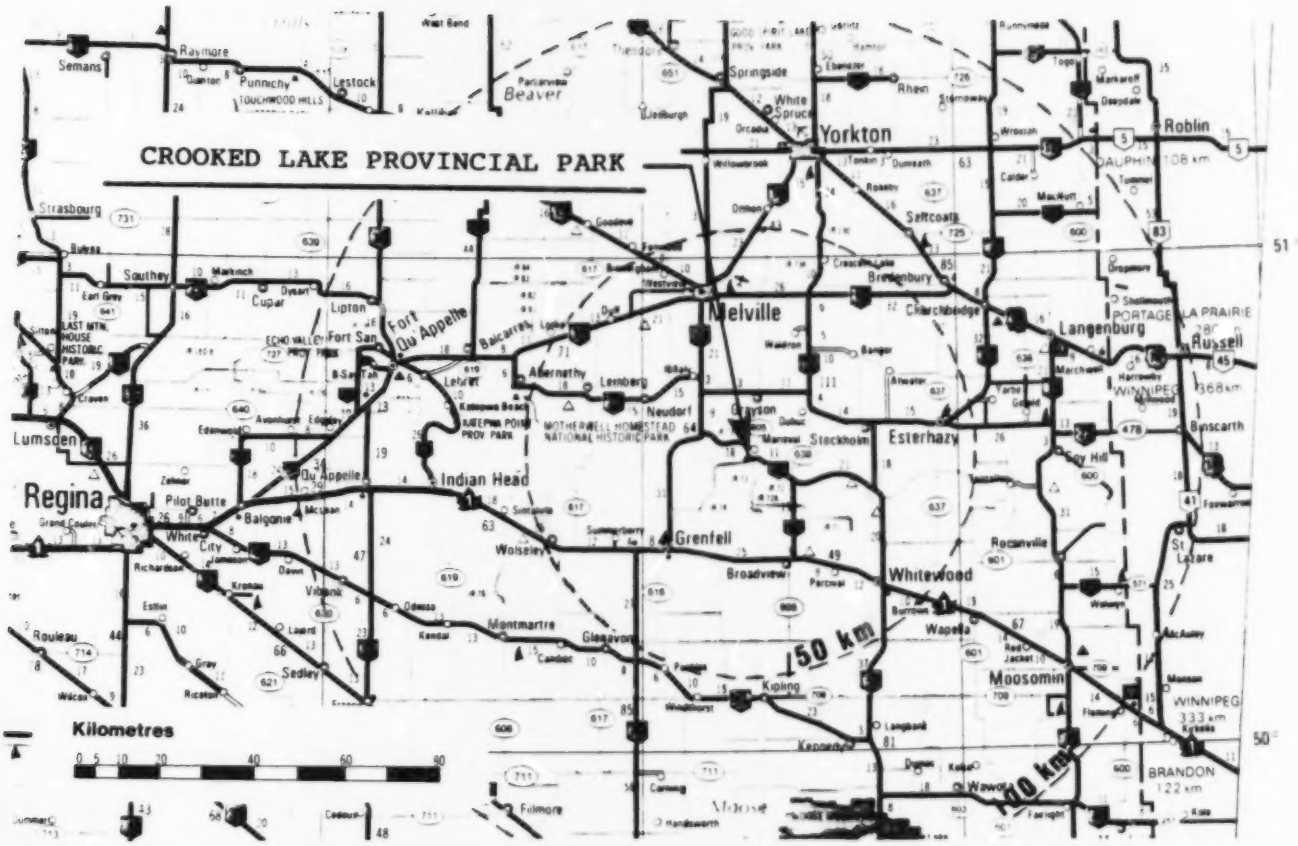
Development of the Provincial Recreation Park will ensure that a suitable portion of the Qu'Appelle Valley and part of the Crooked Lake shoreline is protected for public use and enjoyment. Interpretive and extensive recreation facilities developed within the Park will complement those facilities established elsewhere throughout the Qu'Appelle Valley recreation corridor.

Interpretation of the natural environment, including the native flora and fauna, as well as historical, geological and archaeological features within the Park and elsewhere in the local area, can add to the visitors' appreciation and understanding of the Park. Scenic viewpoints, developed trails, markers and interpretive facilities can also supplement the recreational support facilities.

Much of the land within the Park could be actively used to provide opportunities for hiking, picnicking, camping, nature study, scenic appreciation and cross-country skiing. The Park provides direct access to the lake for sport fishing, boating, sailing, water skiing, swimming and other aquatic activities. Day use will continue to be most attractive to visitors from the region.

The Park will become an important site for tourists who are passing through the region on Highway #247. The variety of outdoor recreational activities possible, as well as picnicking and overnight camping, combined with its scenic attractiveness could combine to make this Park a natural stopping point. Because of the lack of major tourist attractions, accommodations, food and other necessary services, the Park is not expected to serve as a tourist destination area.

Figure 1: Regional Perspective



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